AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please cancel claims 15-19 (claims 1-14 previously were cancelled), and add new claims 20-38 as follows.

1-19. (Cancelled)

20. (New) A switching fabric for a network switch, the network switch for a switching packets in a network, the switching fabric comprising:

a first integrated circuit chip;

a plurality of full duplex serial links;

a plurality of blades each comprising at least one physical port, wherein each of the plurality of blades is coupled to the first integrated circuit chip through at least one of the serial links, whereby the plurality of blades are interconnected;

wherein the first integrated circuit chip is operable to serially transmit a serial block of data via a said serial link to any of said blades, the serial block of data comprising originating blade identifier information and at least one byte of a said packet.

21. (New) The switching fabric of claim 20, further comprising a plurality of the first integrated circuit chips, wherein each of the plurality of blades is coupled to each of the plurality of first integrated circuit chips through at least one of the plurality of serial links, whereby the plurality of blades are interconnected.

22. (New) The switching fabric of claim 20, wherein the serial block of data further comprises an identifier of a start of a said packet.

23. (New) The switching fabric of claim 20, wherein the serial block of data further comprises an identifier of an end of a said packet.

24. (New) The switching fabric of claim 20, wherein the serial block of data further comprises payload state information.

25. (New)The switching fabric of claim 20, wherein the serial block of data further comprises payload state information and an identifier of an end of a said packet.

26. (New) A switching fabric for a network switch, the network switch for a switching packets in a network, the switching fabric comprising:

a plurality of first integrated circuit chips; and

a plurality of blades each comprising at least one physical port;

wherein each said blade comprises a second integrated circuit chip, each said second integrated circuit chip being coupled to each said first integrated circuit chip by a full-duplex serial link, whereby the plurality of blades are interconnected;

wherein each said first integrated circuit is operable to serially receive a block of data from a said second integrated circuit of a first said blade via a said serial link, the block of data comprising in-band control information and at least one byte of a said packet, and to serially transmit the block of data to a said second integrated circuit of another said blade via another said serial link.

27. (New) The switching fabric of claim 26, wherein each said first integrated circuit is operable to insert in the serial block of data an identifier of the first said blade prior to transmitting the block of data.

28. (New) The switching fabric of claim 26, wherein the in-band control information comprises an identifier of an end of a said packet.

29. (New) The switching fabric of claim 28, wherein the block of data further comprises payload state information.

30. (New) The switching fabric of claim 26, wherein the block of data further comprises payload state information.

31. (New) The switching fabric of claim 26, wherein the block of data serially transmitted to the second integrated circuit chip comprises an identifier of the first said blade.

32. (New) The switching fabric of claim 31, wherein the in-band control information comprises an identifier of an end of a said packet.

33. (New) The switching fabric of claim 20, wherein the serial block of data further comprises an identifier of a start of a said packet.

34. (New) The switching fabric of claim 26, wherein the block of data serially received by the first integrated circuit comprises an identifier of the second said blade.

35. (New) A switching fabric for a network switch, the network switch for a switching packets in a network, the switching fabric comprising:

a first integrated circuit chip;

a plurality of full duplex serial links;

a plurality of blades each comprising at least one second integrated circuit for interfacing with the first integrated circuit chip, wherein the at least one second integrated circuit of each of the plurality of blades is coupled to the first integrated circuit chip through at least one of the serial links, whereby the plurality of blades are interconnected;

wherein the second integrated circuit of a first said blade is operable to send to serially transmit a serial block of data via a said serial link to the first integrated circuit, and the first integrated circuit then serially transmits the serial block of data to the second integrated circuit of a second said blade via another said serial link, the serial block of data comprising an identifier of an end of a said packet, blade identifier information, and at least one byte of a said packet.

36. (New) The switching fabric of claim 35, wherein the serial block comprises an identifier of the first said blade.

37. (New) The switching fabric of claim 35, wherein the serial block comprises an identifier of the second said blade.

38. (New) The switching fabric of claim 36, wherein the serial block of data further comprises payload state information.